

THE SEALED HAND—A WINTER SERMON

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A SERMON
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*“He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work.”
Job 37:7*

WHEN the Lord seals up a man's hand, he is unable to perform his labor. The Lord has an objective in this, namely, “that all men may know *his* work.” When they cannot do their own work, they are intended to observe the works of God. This is a fact which I fear many of us have never noticed. When the ground is hardened into iron by the frost, when the land lies deep beneath the snow, when the ox rests in the stall, and the servants warm their hands at the fire, then the farmer's hand is sealed up, but I fear the divine purpose is not often heeded.

As you look through the frosted pane upon the driving snow, do you say to yourself, “God has taken me off from my own work and given me a holiday which He would have me turn into a holy day, let me now turn my thoughts to the Lord's great works in nature, providence, and grace, shut out from my calling, I am also shut in to think of my God and of His work”?

To the most of us it happens at sundry times, that we are set aside from our ordinary service, and it is well if we improve the hour. One is never absent from his desk, another is regularly behind the counter, a third is always diligent in his travelling, but sooner or later, there comes a day of pain and weakness, when the usual course of life is interrupted and the busiest man lies still. In the sick chamber for weeks and months God seals up the active hand, and thus He presents to the busy a quiet season for reflection.

In France, they call the hospital “the house of God,” and it is well when it becomes so. The man who will not think of God if he can help it, while he is busy in the world, is by sickness blessed with time for consideration, and being set aside from turmoil, he is invited to rise above his engrossing cares.

The great Father seems to say, “Lie there alone, lie awake through the night watches, and think of your past ways, and what they lead to. Listen to the tick of the clock, and mark the flight of time, till you number your days and apply your heart unto wisdom. Your own work you cannot touch, now, therefore, think of the work of your God and Savior till you obtain the blessing which comes of it.” This is the design of sickness and inability to follow our calling, thus is our hand sealed from its occupation that our heart may be unsealed towards God, and heaven, and eternal things.

*“It needs our hearts be weaned from earth,
It needs that we be driven,
By loss of every earthly stay,
To seek our joys in heaven.”*

It is clear that God can easily seal up the hand of man if he uses his strength in rebellion or folly, for He has other seals besides sickness. When the wicked are determined to carry out a plan which is not according to His mind, He can baffle them. See the people gathering on the plain of Shinar, bringing together brick and slime that they may build a tower whose lofty height shall mark the center of a universal monarchy! What does God do? By simply confounding their language, he seals every man's hand. No storm, or flood, or earthquake could have more effectually caused the workmen to desist.

Look through the loopholes of retreat tonight upon this wicked world, and see men urgent with schemes which to them appear admirable. If they are not for God's glory, He that sits in heaven does

laughs, the Lord does have them in derision. With a word He seals up their hand, so that it loses all its cunning and their purpose falls to the ground.

Sometimes He closes up the hands of His inveterate enemies with the cold seal of death. Walk over the place where Sennacherib's hosts had pitched their tents. They spread themselves upon the face of the earth, and threatened to devour Judah and Jerusalem, yea, to swallow them up quick, but "the angel of death spread his wings on the blast," and the sleepers never again rose to blaspheme JEHOVAH.

They lie with their weapons under their heads, but they cannot grasp them, bows, and spears, and chariots remain as a spoil to the armies of the Lord. Let us never, therefore, be disturbed by the vauntings of the adversaries of JEHOVAH. He can seal up their hands, and then the men of might are captives. "The Lord reigneth."

*"Though sinners boldly join,
Against the Lord to rise,
Against His Christ combine,
Th' Anointed to despise;
Though earth disdain,
And hell engage,
Vain is their rage,
Their counsel vain."*

We will leave that part of the subject and handle the text in another way. Here is first, a word to *Christian workers*, and when we have so expounded it, we shall turn to *struggling believers*, panting for victory, for with both these classes there are seasons when their hands are sealed. Thirdly, we shall speak to *such as are toiling after self-salvation*, for it is a happy thing when such an hour comes to them also, and they cease from their own work, and know the work of the Lord.

I. First then, I speak to YOU WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE, and have grown into strong men in Christ Jesus.

Do not be surprised if sometimes your Master seals up your hand *by a consciousness of unfitness*. You may have preached for years, and yet just now you feel as if you could never preach again. Your cry is, "I am shut up and cannot come forth." The brain is weary, the heart is faint, and you are on the brink of saying, "I will speak no more in the name of the Lord." Your seed basket is empty, and your ploughshare is rusty, when you get to the granary, it seems to be locked against you. What are you to do?

No message from God drops sweetly into your soul, and how can your speech among the people distil as the dew? Perhaps some of you who have lately begun to serve the Lord wonder that it should ever be so with us older workers. You will not wonder long, for it will happen to you also.

When a farmer sows his field with a drill, the drill has no aches and pains, for it has no nerves, and nothing to prevent the seed shaking out of it with precise regularity, but our great Lord never sows His fields with iron drills. He uses men and women like ourselves, who are liable to headaches and heartaches, and all sorts of miseries, and therefore cannot sow as they could wish.

Comrades in the Lord's work, it is essential that we learn our own inability, it is profitable to feel that without our Lord we can do nothing, but that the Lord can do very well without us. If we cannot break the clods, His frost is doing it, if we cannot water the soil, His snow is saturating it. When man is paralyzed, God is not even hindered.

When we feel our own weakness, it is that we may know the Lord's work, and comprehend that whatever understanding we have, He gave us, whatever thought or utterance we have, He wrought it in us, and if we have any power among men to deliver the precious Gospel of Christ, He has anointed us to that end. Therefore, if we have received, we may not boast as if we had not received. It is a great blessing for us to be emptied of self that God may be all in all, for then our infirmities cease to be drawbacks, and rise into qualifications through divine grace. This has a world of comfort in it.

Sometimes the Christian worker's hand is sealed, not by his own incompetence, but *by the hardness of the hearts he has to deal with*. Do we not often cry, "I cannot make any impression upon that man. I have tried in several ways, but I cannot find a vulnerable place in him. I cannot get the sword of truth to strike at him"? Have you never mourned that you could not touch those children, they were so volatile and frivolous? Have you not been ready to weep because so many men are so coarse, so drunken, and so reckless? Have you not groaned, "Lord, I cannot get at those wealthy people, they are educated and sneer at my mistakes, and they are so eaten up with the conceit of their own position that they will not come to You as the poor do, and receive Your salvation. Truly, my hand is sealed"?

This is all meant to drive you to your God in prayer, crying, "It is time for You, Lord, to work." Oh, for that word which is like a hammer, breaking the rock in pieces! Oh, that the fire would melt and save the sinner!

Another thing which often seals the hand of the worker, and leaves it maimed and bleeding, is *the apostasy of any who were thought to be converts*. Oh, how we rejoiced over them! Perhaps just a little, behind the door, we thought how wonderfully well we labored to have such converts. As we saw them at worship, and remembered that they were once drunkards and swearers, we almost whispered that a notable miracle had been wrought by us. Ah me, how light-fingered we are! How ready to rob God of His glory to clothe self with it! What did the Lord do? He let our precious convert go reeling home, and he that prayed at the prayer meeting was heard cursing, thus all our weaving was unraveled.

Then we wept and cried, "We have accomplished nothing at all! We have only bred a generation of hypocrites! They only need to be tempted and they go back again! Alas for us!" We shall return to our work with more tenderness and humility, with more prayer and faith, and looking alone to God we shall see His hand outstretched to save. We shall wonder that we have not gone back ourselves, and shall be prepared to sing Jude's doxology, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen." When the Lord seals up your hand in any way, then, dear Christian worker, consider God's work, and call Him into the field.

*"Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!
Thy power unconquerable take;
Thy strength put on, assert Thy might,
And triumph in the dreadful fight.*

*Why dost Thou tarry, mighty Lord?
Why slumbers in its sheath Thy sword?
Oh, rouse Thee, for Thine honour's sake;
Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!*

*Haste then, but come not to destroy;
Mercy is Thine, Thy crown, Thy joy;
Their hatred quell, their pride remove,
But melt with grace, subdue with love."*

Some think the text teaches that when God seals up a man's hand, it is that he may know his own work—that is, that he may perceive what poor, imperfect work it is, that he may form a correct estimate of it and not glory in it, that he may observe the scantiness of the sphere of human action, and mourn how ineffective, how despicable, how feeble man's efforts are apart from God's power. It is a great blessing to know our own work and to be humble, but still it is a higher blessing to know the Lord's work and to be confident in Him.

O brothers and sisters, we must be nothing, or the Lord will not use us! If the axe vaunteth itself against him that fells therewith, he will fling that axe away. If we sacrifice to our own net, the great

Fisherman will never drag the sea with us again till He has made us more fit for use. Oh, to be nothing, to lie at His feet, and then, full of His power, because emptied of our own, to move forward to victory! May the Lord work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, then shall we work out a glorious destiny to His praise.

II. This Scripture equally applies to THE CASE OF THE STRUGGLING BELIEVER.

The man is earnestly striving. See him! *He is seeking to pray.* I sometimes ask young people, “Do you pray?” They answer, “We could not live without prayer.” “Can you always pray alike?” I thank God that I usually receive the answer, “No, sir, we wish we could always be earnest.” Just so. A steam engine can always do its work with equal force, but a living man cannot always pray. A mere actor can perform the externals of devotion at any time, but the real suppliant has his variations.

We have all read of the preacher who, while preaching, used to cry most unaccountably when others were untouched. The reason was that he had put in the margin of his manuscript, “Cry here,” and this he had done in the quiet of his study, without considering whether the passage would really produce tears. A man of genuine emotion cannot make himself cry at say, half-past seven in the morning and ten at night.

Mighty prevailing prayer is an effect of the inward impulses of the Spirit of God, and the Spirit bloweth where He listeth. We cannot command His influence. We ought always to pray most when we think we cannot pray at all. Mark that paradox. When you feel disinclined to pray, let it be a sign to you that prayer is doubly needful. Pray for prayer. Yet there are times with me, and I suppose with you, when at the throne of grace I mourn because I cannot mourn, and feel wretched because all feeling has fled.

The Lord has sealed up my hand, that is, that I may learn anew how His Spirit helps my infirmities, and that I am powerless in supplication till He quickens me. We could as easily create a world as present a fervent prayer without the Spirit of God. We need to have this written upon our hearts, for only so shall we offer those inwrought supplications which the Lord hears with delight.

See the struggling believer, next, when *he tries to learn the truth of God.* For instance, in reading the Scriptures, he pants to know the meaning of them. Did you never try to dig into a passage, and find yourself unable to make headway? Fetch a commentary! Do you find that it leaves your difficulty untouched? Have you not begun at the wrong end? Would it not be better to pray your way into the text, and when you have got somewhat through the rind of it, will it not be well to imitate a mouse when he meets with cheese, and eats his way to the center?

Work away at the passage by prayer and experience, and you will tunnel into the secret. Yet you will at times find yourself lost among grand truths and quite unable to cut your way through the forest of doctrines, because your understanding seems to have lost its edge. God has sealed up your hand that now you may go to Him for instruction, and clearly see that, not in books nor in teachers, but in His Holy Spirit is the light by which the Word of truth is to be understood by the soul. He seals up our hand that we may sit at His feet.

*“Light in Thy light oh may we see,
Thy grace and mercy prove,
Revived, and cheered, and blessed by Thee,
Spirit of peace and love.”*

The struggling believer may have *set himself to watch against certain sin.* Possibly he has enjoyed his morning’s devotion, and he goes downstairs resolved to be patient, whatever provocation may occur, for he wept last night over the evil done by a quick temper. He converses cheerfully, and yet, before the breakfast is over, the lion is roused, and he is in the wars again. The poor man murmurs to himself, “What will become of me? This hot temper runs away with me.”

Do not excuse yourself, but still learn from your own folly. Does not the Lord thus let you see your own weakness more and more till you gird on His strength and overcome it? Remember, it must be

conquered. You must not dare to be the slave of a fierce temper, or indeed of any sin. If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed, and it is His emancipating hand that you need within. Sanctification is the work of the Spirit of God, and only He can accomplish it, and it is for you to cry unto the Strong for strength.

Perhaps the struggle is of yet another kind. *You long to grow in grace.* This is a matter worthy of the utmost desire and labor, and yet, as a matter of fact, neither plants nor souls do actually grow through conscious effort. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.” Children of God, when they grow, grow up into Christ, not by agonies and excitements, but by the quiet force of the inward life renewed from day to day by the Holy Ghost.

We have heard some true saints complain that they felt as if they were rather growing downward than upward, for they feel worse instead of better. Thus do many of the plants of our garden grow, and we are joyful that it is so, for we want not the useless top growth, but we prize the root. To grow downward in humility may be the best possible growth, the hand sealed may be bringing us more spiritual profit than the hand at work.

III. I might thus enlarge, but it would come to the same thing, and therefore I leave the struggling Christians to lend a hand to THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS, whom I would gladly help into a ditch, and leave there till the Almighty One shall come to take them out.

If we believe their own statements, there are a great many very good people in this world. True, the Bible says, “There is none that doeth good; no, not one,” but that is an old-fashioned sort of book. Good men are plentiful as blackberries. I hear certain of them bearing witness that they are quite as good as those who make a profession of religion, and in fact, rather better. They are so good that they do not even profess to trust the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you excessively good people, I am right glad when the Lord seals up your hands so that you cannot persevere in your fine doings, and are compelled to try the true way of getting to heaven.

Sometimes that sealing up comes by a discovery that the law of God is spiritual, and that the service of God is a matter of the heart. Here is a good woman! She says, “I never stole a penny. I always pay my debts. I am sober, kind, and industrious. I thank God I am not a gossip, or proud, or idle, as so many are.” Is she not a superior person? But observe a change! She hears a sermon, or reads the Bible, and finds that external goodness is nothing unless there is goodness in the heart, unless there is love to God and love to men, unless there is the new birth, and a consequent total and radical change of nature, manifested by a simple reliance upon Christ.

Is this the same woman? How different her manner! How changed the tone of her talk! Hear her exclaim, “I am utterly lost! I had no idea that God required the heart, and judged our thoughts and desires. What searching truths! A look can make me guilty of adultery. Anger without a cause is murder.” If this fact comes with power to the heart, the hand is sealed, and all hope of salvation by works is gone. Oh, that this would happen to all self-justifiers! Oh, that the Lord would wean them from self, that they might know *His* work, the work of Christ, who satisfied the law for all His people, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him!

Sometimes an actual sin has let in light upon the sinfulness of the heart! I knew a young man who, in his own esteem, was as fine a fellow as ever worked in a shop. He prided himself that he had never told a lie, nor been dishonest, nor a drunkard, nor loose in his life, and if the Savior had said to him that he must keep the commandments, he would have replied, “All these have I kept from my youth up.”

In pushing a fellow workman, he upset an oilcan. It happened to have been upset before, and the master had spoken strongly about the careless waste. The master, coming along on this occasion, called out, “Who upset that can?” “The young man said that he did not know, though he himself was the offender. That passed away. No further question was asked, but in a moment he said to himself, “I have told a lie. I never would have believed myself capable of such meanness.” His beautiful card house tumbled down, the bubble of his reputation burst, and he said to himself, “Now I understand what Mr.

Spurgeon means by the depravity of the heart. I am a good-for-nothing creature, what must I do to be saved?”

No doubt outward sin has often revealed the secret power of evil in the heart. The leprosy has come out upon the skin, and so it has been seen to be in the system. Thus is pride hidden from man, and his hand is sealed up that he may look for mercy from God, and live.

Yes, I have known God seal up some men’s hands *by a sense of spiritual inability*, so that they have said, “I cannot pray. I thought I prayed every morning and night, but I now see that it is not prayer at all. I cannot now praise God, I used to sit in the choir, and sing as sweetly as any of them, but I was singing to my own glory, and not unto the Lord. I fear I have been deceiving myself, and setting up my righteousness instead of Christ’s, and that is the worst form of idolatry. I have dishonored God, and I have crucified Christ, by arrogating to myself the power of self-salvation. I have un-Christed Christ, and counted His blood to be a superfluous thing.” When a man has come to that, then he—

*“Casts his deadly doing down,
Down at Jesu’s feet,
To stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete.”*

“What!” cries yonder friend, “Would you not have us do good works?” Yes, a host of them, but not to save yourself thereby. You must do them because you are saved. You know what children do when they are little and silly, they go into their fathers garden, and pick handfuls of flowers, and make a garden. “A pretty, pretty garden,” so they say. Wait till tomorrow morning, and every flower will be withered, and there will be no pretty garden at all, for their flowers have no roots.

That is what you do when you cultivate good works before faith, it is a foolish, fruitless business. Repent of sin, and believe in Jesus, for these are the roots of good works, and though at first they look like black bulbs, with no beauty in them, yet out of them shall come the rarest flowers in the garden of holiness. Get away with your good works. Get away with your salvation of yourself. This is all proud fancy and falsehood. Why did God send a Savior if you need no saving? What need of the cross if you can be saved by your own works? Why did Jesus bleed and die if your own merits are sufficient? Come, ye guilty, come, ye weary, come, ye whose hands are sealed, so that ye can do nothing more, take the work of Christ, and be saved by it at once.

A young sister, whom I saw just now, told me how a friend helped her to see the way of salvation. She could not believe in Jesus Christ because she did not feel herself to be all that she wanted to be, but the friend said to her, “Suppose I were to give you this Bible for a present.” “Yes.” “Would it not be yours as soon as you took it? It would not depend upon whether you were good or not, would it?” “No.” “Well, then,” the friend replied, “the Lord God has given Jesus Christ to you as a free gift, and if you take him by faith, He is yours immediately, whoever you may be.” The case stands just so. Accept Jesus as the free gift of God to you, and you are saved, and being saved, you will work with all your might to show your gratitude to God your Savior.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 94

This is the prayer of a man of God in great trouble, standing out for God in an evil day, when the Lord’s people were greatly oppressed, and the honor of God was being trampled in the mire. The prayer wells up from an oppressed heart struggling against great difficulty.

Verse 1. *O LORD God—*

“O JEHOVAH, EL.” Men of God in trouble delight to call upon the name of the Lord. His very name is a stronghold to them, the infinite JEHOVAH, the strong God, EL, “O LORD God,”—

1. *To whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.*

Vengeance does not belong to us, it is not right for any private individual to attempt to avenge himself, but vengeance belongs to the just Judge, who will mete out to all the due reward of evil or of good. Hence, my appeal is to the Court of King’s Bench, or higher still, to the King Himself, “O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.” When false doctrine abounds, only God can put it down. All the efforts of the faithful will be futile apart from Him.

2-4. *Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?*

That expression, “How long?” repeated three times, is very sorrowful, it seems to get into a kind of howling or wailing, but a child of God, when he sees things going wrong with his Lord’s kingdom, must grow somewhat impatient, and he cries out to His God, “How long? How long? How long wilt Thou bear it?” The very triumphs of the wicked, and the hard things they say, with which they seem to bubble over like fountains (for that is the force of the term “utter and speak” used here), stir the heart of the man of God to its very depths. He gets by himself alone, and grieves before God, and out of a full heart he thus cries to Him, “How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?”

5. *They break in pieces thy people, O LORD,—*

There is a strong plea in that declaration, for the Lord of hosts says to His people, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye.” In days of persecution the saints can pray in this fashion, “They break in pieces thy people, JEHOVAH,”—

5-6. *And afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.*

This made the appeal still stronger, for God is “a Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows.”

7. *Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.*

Yet this very God of Jacob came to the troubled patriarch at Jabbok, and blessed him there, and He said to heathen kings, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,” so can it be true that He does not see and regard what the wicked do to His people? They dare to say so, and render themselves the more brazen in their sin because of this, their infidelity.

8. *Understand, ye brutish among the people:*

Here the pleader turns into a prophet, and after having spoken to God, he now speaks to men. Understand, ye boors,” for so the word may be rendered, “Ye swine among the people:”—

8-9. *And ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?* [See sermon #2118, The Planter of the Ear Must Hear].

You say that God does not see, that He does not regard, but how can that be? You are mad to talk so. He that gave men the sense of hearing, cannot He Himself hear? He that gave them sight, cannot He see?

*“Shall He who, with transcendent skill,
Fashion’d the eye, and form’d the ear;
Who modell’d nature to His will,
Shall He not see? Shall He not hear?”*

*Vain hope! His eye at once surveys
Whatever fills creation’s space;
He sees our thoughts, and marks our ways,
He knows no bounds of time and place.”*

10. *He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?*

He judges all nations, read the Book of Providence, and see how He deals out justice to nation after nation, so shall He not also correct the individual man?

10. *He that teacheth man knowledge,—*

If you look at your Bibles, you will see that the translators have put in here the words, “shall not he know.” They are printed in italics because they are not in the original. The original is very abrupt, it is as if the psalmist had said, “There, I am tired of arguing with you. You can draw your own inference, I will leave you to do that for yourselves. Fools as you are, I need not draw the inference for you.”

“He that teacheth man knowledge.” Does man really know anything unless God teaches him? Adam was taught of God at the first, and every particle of true science that man knows has been imparted by God. I do not say that God is the author of the science of today, much of that evidently comes from man, but all true knowledge is imparted to us by God. “He that teacheth man knowledge,” do you think—do you dream—that He does not Himself know everything?

10-11. *Shall not he know? The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.*

He knows that men are vanity, that they are, according to one translation, a vapor. The men themselves are but a vapor, but as for their thoughts, their intellect, their power to think, that of which many men are most proud, what does God think of this? What a wonderful thing “modern thought” seems to be! But listen to this, “The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are nothing.” Vanity is a negation, it is a bubble, a thing puffed up, that has no substance in it, “The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.”

12. *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law* [See sermon #2374, Blessed Discipline];

These are two things that go well together—a rod and a book, no man ever learns much without both rod and book. “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest.” The Book is never properly understood without some touches of the rod, but the Book must be there also, “and teachest him out of thy law,” for if it were all rod and no Book, there would be plenty of scars, but there would be no learning. Have you got the two together, my dear friend? Have you been of late very much with the Book in a nook, and very much with the rod upon your bed? Well then, you are a blessed man, for the psalmist says, “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law.”

13. *That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.*

In these days, the quiet virtues are not prized as much as they ought to be. Men are always busy, they must be ever on the trot, but blessed is the man who is so taught by the Book and by the rod that he comes to a holy quietism, and learns to rest. The best rest is the best worker. He who knows how to sit at Jesu’s feet knows how to work for Jesus better than if he were continually running about, and getting cumbered with much service.

We never learn the secret of this rest by the Book alone, or by the rod alone, but the rod and the book together teach us to rest from the days of adversity, they teach us not to lay the present too much to heart, not to fret because of things as they are today, but to think of what is to be in that day when the righteous shall be rewarded, and when the mighty Hunter shall have trapped His adversary and ours, when the pit shall be digged for the wicked, and Satan’s power shall be forever destroyed.

14. *For the LORD will not cast off his people,—*

He may cast them down, but He will never cast them off.

14. *Neither will he forsake his inheritance.*

Even men will not give up their inheritance. This is especially the case among the Jews, you remember how Naboth would not sell his inheritance, he would sooner die. And the Lord will not forsake His inheritance, there is a sacred entail upon His people that never can be broken, and He will never give them up.

15. *But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it.*

The wicked may be the upper spokes of the wheel just now, but they will be the lower spokes before long. Truth may be in the mire today, but she shall be upon the throne tomorrow. The revolutions of the

wheels of providence produce strange changes. Wait, work, watch, for the Lord will set things right in His own good time.

16. *Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?*

The Psalmist appeals for helpers, but he gets no response from man, and sometimes the man of God will have to stand alone, and that can be an education for him. Blessed is he who has learned to hang on the bare arm of God, he is better off without his earthly friends than he was with them.

Here is the answer to the psalmist's question—

17. *Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.*

You may be one of the best of God's servants, and yet that may be your experience.

Here is another piece of testimony in which many of us can join—

18. *When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.*

"My foot had slipped from under me, I was down, and then, even then, You did put underneath me Your everlasting arms. 'Thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.'"

19. *In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul* [See sermon #883, Multitudinous Thoughts and Sacred Comforts].

"My thoughts"—so some read this verse—"seem intertwined and interlaced like the many boughs of a tree. I cannot make them out myself, they are in such a tangle." But the bird has learned to sit among the boughs and sing, "Thy comforts delight my soul." There are thoughts of grief, thoughts of fear, thoughts of disappointment, thoughts of desertion, thoughts of a broken heart, all sorts of thoughts, but God's comforts come in, and delight the soul. You know what it is—do you not?—to be cast down, but not destroyed, to be troubled, and yet to be happy. "As sorrowful," says Paul, "yet always rejoicing," whereupon an old divine remarks that it is "*as* sorrowful"—*quasi* sorrowful, but it is not "*as* always rejoicing." There is no "*quasi*" to that, but there is a real joy in the midst of a seeming sorrow. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul."

20. *Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?*

Lord, are You on their side? Oh, no, and as You are not on their side, I care not who is. So long as You will not aid iniquity or help wrong doing, I will, fight the battle through.

21-22. *They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the LORD is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge.*

He gets away unto his God as he had been accustomed to hide in the cave of Adullam out of reach of all his foes, and then he sits down in peace to sing.

23. *And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.*

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